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MHR Connections

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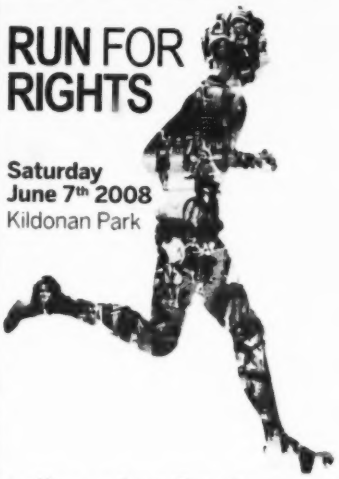
Equality of Opportunity and Freedom from Discrimination

RUN FOR RIGHTS



Sarah Lugtig, Manitoba Human Rights Commission's Legal Counsel, ran in the first *Run for Rights* event and has continued ever since. She says it combines three things dear to her heart - running, raising awareness, and supporting human rights here and around the world.

Sarah describes the annual run as a "true community activity, involving walkers, bikers, runners, roller bladers - even tots in strollers - who reflect the social diversity of our city."

The run, she says, is unlike any other she has ever participated in. "There is none of that tense expectation as you wait for the start. Instead, community leaders come out to cheer us on and give us the latest news on key human rights issues across the globe," she says adding that "you cannot find friendlier or more upbeat volunteers anywhere."

Last year Sarah convinced her marathon training group to join her.

On June 7, 2008 you too can run, walk, roller blade or cycle in support of social justice and human rights. The event is a fundraiser for the Seventh Annual *Run for Rights,* sponsored by the Manitoba Government employees Union (MGEU), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Assiniboine Credit Union, and CKUW the University of Winnipeg on campus radio station.

The Tšepong Clinic is one of the many recipients of the fundraising efforts. This clinic in Lesotho Africa currently has over 4,000 registered patients with over 1300 enrolled in ARV (anti retro virus) treatment. On average 115 patients visit the clinic every day.

Other recipients of this fundraiser include the Aegis Foundation for Development, Engineers Without Borders, Amnesty International, and the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (Welcome Place).

The 5 or 10 km route stretches along Scotia Street from Kildonan Park to St. John's Park in Winnipeg. The event begins at 9:30 a.m. (registration from 8:30 to 9:00 am). For more information about *Run for Rights*, to volunteer, or to find out about other recipients of the fundraising event, visit www.runforrights.org. Everyone is encouraged to collect pledges and participate. To register and receive a pledge form email runforrights@mts.net.

The Rights Connection
by Jerry Woods - Chairperson

No one wants to be labelled or judged

In a recent letter to the editor published in a Manitoba newspaper, a young Aboriginal student bravely wrote about the racism she says she has experienced since moving to a small Manitoba town.

She described the town as "nice…but with a lot of prejudiced people." How do you respond to this young woman who says she has been told by other students to "go back to your reserve" or "I don't want natives in my school." She also describes a playground mural. It is a painting of the earth with linked arms circling it. The problem with this picture is that all the arms are white. She says she was told that there was no coloured paint.

I would like to tell her that I agree that "racism is completely and truly ridiculous." I have hosted many Manitoba Human Rights Commission Youth Conferences across Manitoba and have talked to countless students with similar stories. It is because of what we have heard that the Commission is focusing much of our education program on youth.

I was born in Couchiching First Nation and am of mixed ancestry. In my early teen years I divided my time between living with my family in a small town and with my grandparents, on the reservation. During my life I have tried to live as a white person apart from Aboriginal culture, and at that time I felt incomplete, unaccepted. Sometimes it was the community and the people who lived there. Other times it was me.

The culture of guilt and shame is something many Canadians share, especially Aboriginal people, without really knowing why. For this one young, Aboriginal girl, it begins in the school yard. I am sure I don't need to tell her that there are Aboriginal doctors, lawyers, judges, engineers, corporate executives, politicians, professors, writers, actors, labourers, musicians and bureaucrats. Some of her schoolmates however, may need reminding.

In a free and democratic society when discrimination occurs, some are guilty - perhaps only a few - but all are responsible.

To the young writer of the letter to the editor I would like to say that you have the right to be who you are without being judged or labelled. And if the mural has not changed, I will bring the coloured paint.

Settlements

"Pre-complaint" resolution is a voluntary process allowing mediators at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission to attempt to resolve an issue prior to filing a formal complaint. In many of these cases, the solution is systemic and many more people than the original complainant benefit.

The following cases were resolved using the pre-complaint process.

A complainant believed that the rules and procedures of an appeal board failed to accommodate his special needs. The appeal board had rules regarding those who could attend a hearing. Those rules limited attendance to the party involved, and their counsel or representative.

The complainant believed that this was discriminatory to those with reduced abilities, whether physical or mental since they are not allowed to bring with them a personal attendant, someone to talk on their behalf or someone to take notes.

A commission mediator, with the permission of the complainant, contacted the Secretary to the Board and within a few months the Appeal Board amended the rule. It is now possible for those attending an appeal hearing to request, based on a disability, the attendance of additional support persons.

In another pre-complaint resolution, also dealing with possible discrimination based on disability, a complainant reported to the Commission that, when trying to purchase a pre-sale ticket for accessibility seating to an event, he was refused. He says he was told that the ticket agency only made regular seating available for pre-sale. The complainant is a quadriplegic and uses a wheelchair for mobility.

After speaking with a Commission mediator, the ticket agency changed its guiding principles and its process by allowing pre-sale accessible seating on par with regular seating.

Another complainant alleged that a festival had contravened the Manitoba Human Rights Code by restricting the audience to females only at one of its plays. Both parties agreed to pursue pre-complaint resolution. The festival agreed that all future performing groups and individuals would be told that there is no restriction on audience attendance on the basis of sex. Performances can be advertised however, as "recommended for."

Inner city worker appointed to Commission

Joan Hay can't walk down the street in Winnipeg's Spence Neighbourhood without seeing someone she knows and admits she is often affectionately referred to as the Queen of Spence.

"There is a certain comfort in this," she says adding, "In fact I feel quite safe in Spence at most any time of the day."

Having lived in the city's inner city for over twenty years Joan says she has seen positive changes like housing improvements, community gardens, educational opportunities and an increased awareness of social issues.

Joan's experience and knowledge of community development is a great asset in both her work and volunteer life. She currently is a Community Helper/ Emergency Services Worker at the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (Mamawi), a non-profit Aboriginal Organization. She is also a community representative at the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation, a volunteer radio show co-host of "Inner City Voices" at 95.9 FM CKUW and the past chair and founding member of Inner City Aboriginal Neighbours.

Although Joan has a particular interest in indigenous issues she also has concerns about accessibility and GLTB (Gay, Lesbian, Transgender and Bisexual) issues, and says she has heard lots of talk but has not seen enough action.

"Many public and private places are still inaccessible to people with disabilities and a gay couple dare not walk down the street holding hands," she says.

Discrimination has personally affected Joan and it is this experience that makes becoming a Manitoba human rights commissioner especially appealing to her. "I have always been acutely aware of the inequalities that exist within our society and around the world," she says.

Her advice to people who may be harassed or discriminated against is, "Document everything."

Finally, Joan sees unrest in the future, but calls it a healthy unrest. "I see an escalation in public response to human wrongs as opposed to human rights," and says this type of protest can be a good thing by raising awareness.

Diploma program strengthens police diversity

Who would have believed that when members of the RCMP "D" Division approached the University of Winnipeg identifying a need for a program that would assist police reflect our diverse communities, a police preparation training diploma would be less than one year away.

With funding from the Government of Canada, the University of Winnipeg, the RCMP and the Manitoba Métis Federations' Louis Riel Institute will launch "The Indigenous Police Preparation Diploma."

"Professional policing that reflects and serves all members of our community in an essential part of a respectful justice system, and the cornerstone of our democracy and human rights," says UWinnipeg President and Vice Chancellor Dr. Lloyd Axworthy.

The focus of the UWinnipeg program is to prepare Métis, First Nation and Inuit people for careers in the RCMP. The Diploma program requires eight months of full time study and begins in September 2008. It will encompass academic preparation as well as physical fitness training.

Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission Dianna Scarth says the Commission is very pleased with the announcement.